

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 845

TM 830 322

AUTHOR Blai, Boris, Jr.
TITLE Performance Appraisals Can Yield Tangible Results.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Employment Qualifications; Evaluation Criteria;
*Evaluation Methods; Job Analysis; *Job Performance;
Management by Objectives; Measurement Techniques;
*Personnel Evaluation; Productivity
IDENTIFIERS *Performance Appraisal

ABSTRACT

An objective, measure-oriented job performance appraisal plan permits management to evaluate worker performance more accurately and precisely, and provides a means for assessing the degree-of-match between employee qualifications and job skills requirements for hiring, advancement, and dismissal decisions. Deficient appraisals may be costly, subjective, generalized "guesstimates" and may inaccurately distinguish job components. Effective performance appraisals should clearly state specific job performance requirements, specific desired employee behavior, and a realistic plan for employees to achieve improved performance. To help motivate employees to achieve and sustain acceptable productivity, a performance plan should provide expected outputs, acceptable task standards, and individual feedback information. Among the characteristics of a carefully designed and intelligently used job performance appraisal plan are provisions for checking deficiencies; application of task-standards; monitored performance on a frequent, sustained basis; and appraisal reviews for early warnings of production deficiencies. (CM)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED231845

PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS CAN YIELD
TANGIBLE RESULTS

by

Boris Blai, Jr. Ed.D.
Psychologist-in-retirement

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B. Blai, Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Performance Appraisals Can Yield Tangible Results

Properly designed and used, job performance appraisals are far more than just another check list, or one more rating scale. They can be, in terms of measurable employee behavior, effective means for assessing worker performance; accurately. Today, within the framework of federal legislation and court-mandated requirements, such job performance appraisals must now be considered as essential, necessary management tools.

An objective, measure-oriented performance appraisal plan permits management/supervision to evaluate worker job performance more accurately; more precisely. Well-designed and properly documented, such plans can also provide a means for accurately assessing, (i.e. assessing degrees-of-match between employee qualifications and job skills requirements), the abilities of prospective employees prior to hiring, as well as making employee advancement and dismissal decisions.

DEFICIENT APPRAISALS

Currently, in terms of objective outcomes; i.e. measurable behavior changes, many work performance appraisal plans are a costly waste of money. Time lost in subjectively assessing and documenting inaccurate estimates of work performance is a non-productive expenditure of manpower costs. For one or more of the following reasons, suggesting that such 'guesstimates' yield valid measures of job performance is highly improbable.

1- More often than not, subjective impressions yield ratings too much alike. Lacking objectively-defined task standards, they tend to essentially repeat previously developed rating statements. Additionally, experience has shown they tend to cluster near the more desirable scale values. This is quite unlike the more varied distributions of ratings which result when work performance is objectively measured in terms of work output results and observable

behavioral changes.

2- Work performance appraisals which are generalized 'guesstimates' generate undesirable worker/supervisor reactions. They are apt to view the process as a strained, negative one, ineffective in keeping productivity improvements on the scene.

3- A frequent deficiency noted is that similar rating elements are found among varied, different jobs. In point of fact, different jobs have differing output targets and other standards of job performance. This inaccuracy in distinguishing unlike job components results in generalized, almost meaningless appraisals. Such evaluation instruments are quite useless as a means for fostering improved job performance; i.e., productive outputs.

4- Quite often job performance appraisals are made only twice a year; some but annually. This length time-span between successive appraisals encourages the file-and-forget pattern of behavior. Both supervisors and employees, on a day-to-day basis, deals with concerns requiring immediate attention. Under these circumstances, neither is inclined to step back from immediate requirements and spend much thought and effort on job performance appraisals. If a higher probability is expected in effecting employee behavioral changes, more frequent appraisals are essential to focus on-going attention upon this important production-related technique.

5- Far too often performance assessment plans limit themselves to subjective impressions of employee work habits and traits. There is no objective measurement of work produced by the employee; i.e. output. It is unquestionably helpful to accurately assess and inform an employee that his/her work attitudes are "good". But "good" attitudes alone will not produce completed, acceptable output. Objective, measurable work produced must be an integral element of the assessment system.

Setting accurate, fair performance standards can be an exacting task.

Particularly demanding can be: (1) defining specific measures of specific job tasks, and (2) establishing rating scale performance standards which reflect differences in productivity; e.g., what ranges of measurable production are to be included in adjective ratings of "Excellent"; "Good"; "Fair"; "Poor"?

6- Vague expressions in supervisors of generalized feelings and attitudes are a poor substitute for measurable output standards and defined employee behaviors considered acceptable. Perhaps a worker will modify job behavior, (at least while the supervisor is present), but how does this relate to the quality and quantity of work produced? Does it improve, measurably, with the behavioral change? How can improvements in job performance be accurately and reliably measured without an established, worker-known, production standard: they cannot!

7- Follow-up and on-going involvement by managers/supervisors in employee job performance changes and improvements is an absolute 'must'. This participation is as important as the actual measurement of productivity. Expecting behavior changes to be the sole responsibility of the worker is just not enough. Such desired behavior changes must be constantly reinforced by managers/supervisors. They should:

- (1) identify the employee's job performance weaknesses.
- (2) make these facts known to the employee; in a positive, constructive manner.

Expecting lasting improvements without this keystone feedback process is simply unrealistic. Employees must believe that management-supervision is interested in their work contribution before they can reasonably be expected to try making improvements in their productivity.

EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE
APPRAISALS

What are the basic requirements for an effective job performance appraisal

plan? To meet the dual objectives of

- (1) helping improve employee work performance; i.e., quality/quantity, and
- (2) insuring informational feedback to employees,

the plan should embrace the following characteristics. How to achieve them should be clearly stated; in language that is simple, unambiguous:

- (a) spell out specific job performance requirements; e.g., what is to be done; how; when; where.
- (b) specify desired employee behaviors; e.g., attitudes of cooperation; consideration; fairness. Cleanliness; sobriety, etc.
- (c) state, specifically, a realistic plan for employees to use in achieving improved job performance.

In developing job performance statements to help motivate employees to achieve sustain, acceptable productivity, the following should be included:

A- Specify expected outputs:-

Workers produce physical products and/or services. These are the end products - the outputs - management/supervision expect employees to produce, (e.g., lawn mowers) or services performed, (e.g., counseling interviews). It is these end products that are to be measured. It is these end products which are to be made known to employees.

All outputs share three common characteristics. They are:

- 1- what is to be produced; not how-to step to get the task done.
- 2- Observable employee behaviors. They can be seen; therefore they may be compared with other employees.
- 3- Specific job tasks that can be counted; not general, vague statements about the job.

By spelling out and measuring specific job tasks which are cost-relevant,

the primary components of a sound performance appraisal plan have been delineated.

B- Establish acceptable production standards:-

The 'partner' to stating expected outputs is developing standards for acceptable production. These standards are to be reinforced by management-supervision. When appropriate, by rewards/awards; and as needed - when they are below standards in production, by appropriate positive, corrective counseling. In short - managers/supervisors may utilize these facts about outputs to help insure sustained, acceptable employee productivity. And for the worker - clearly spelled-out standards serve him/her as a production 'target' to 'hit'.

Such standards must meet the twin objectives of specifying:

- (1) acceptable quality of performance; i.e. how well the job is to be done, and
- (2) the where; when; and what of the conditions under which the task is to be performed.

Properly defined, such standards permit managers/supervisors to:

- a- specify and pass along to employees precisely what kind; e.g., quality; reject rate, etc. of task performance is desired.
- b- measure , precisely, the tasks selected for evaluation; i.e. those which are meaningful in terms of production costs.
- c- provide for workers specific, helpful information, (the feedback process!) , regarding the quality of their output.

Careful analysis of desired performance goals in terms of cost; quality; completeness; rate; rejects; and timeliness is a make-or-break element. Without such specific facts this second major step cannot be accomplished.

C- Feedback plan:-

Unless this critical third step is realistically

performed by management/supervision, minimal improvements, if any, can be anticipated. On-going, accurate feedback communications is The means, between job appraisal reviews, to provide employees stimulation and opportunity to improve less-than-acceptable job performance. Equally important - it also serves the valuable function of providing a means for on-going recognition of jobs "well-done".

Unfortunately - accurate, meaningful (i.e. to the worker) feedback information is often conspicuous by its absence. However, knowledgeable management personnel are fully aware that effective feedback communications can make-or-break productivity. The practical importance of establishing, and using, feedback information that is valid can hardly be over-emphasized.

Conversely, to ignore or minimize timely feedback data virtually 'guarantees' the following deficiencies:

- 1- is performance, in fact, increasing/improving? Without accurate feedback facts this question cannot be answered; accurately.
- 2- do workers know how their job performance compares with the standards for that job? Without accurate feedback data, this question cannot be answered; accurately. Further - with such feedback information, workers can be more effective in correcting job performance deficiencies.
- 3- It is a reasonable certainty: without valid feedback facts work performance improvements will not be sustained. Over an extended period of time it may be anticipated that such improvements will diminish or disappear entirely.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize - there are seven characteristics to be found in a carefully designed and intelligently used job performance appraisal plan. They are:

- 1- Pay attention to outputs rather than simply observing worker activities.

The latter is quite often irrelevant to production; the former is a direct, tangible measure of production tasks which are cost significant.

2- Don't 'short-cut' feedback flow by talking to groups rather than individual workers. To be maximally meaningful for an employee, feedback facts must be specific; directly related to his or her job performance.

3- When production problem areas are identified and corrective action taken, subsequent output must be carefully measured. To determine that desired results have occurred, such measurements must be made.

4- When a performance deficiency has been incorrectly identified, look to the task standard applied. Often the correct task-standard has not been selected. Carefully recheck the particulars of the performance deficiency. Then select another task-standard which appears to be more appropriate.

5- Never assume that experience guarantees satisfactory job performance: measure!

6- To satisfactorily monitor job performance on a sustained basis, appraise job performance sufficiently frequently; quarterly? monthly?

7- Do not rely on employees to report job performance problems. They may be reluctant or simply unaware of the difficulty. Instead, use regular job appraisal reviews as an 'early-warning' device for pinpointing production deficiencies.

Modifying performance appraisal systems to reflect less generalized statements is a time-effort investment paying worthwhile dividends; i.e better quality/quantity production. It is purely wasteful of management/supervision time to dissipate their efforts in ineffectual performance appraisals.

Developing and utilizing guidelines which precisely identify specific task outputs and other job performance standards; e.g. quality; timeliness, etc. commend their use. Additionally, such appraisal plans must insure, scrupulously, that adequate feedback information is relayed to employees by supervisors.

* * * * *